

# Measuring real-world outcomes of AAC for children and youth in school activity settings

Project Summary

Centre for Leadership in Participation and Inclusion

*Steve Ryan, Anne Marie Renzoni, Tracy Shepherd, and Danielle D'Alessandro (Holland Bloorview), Liisa Smith, (Toronto District School Board), Gail Ozols (York Catholic District School Board), and Jim Donohoo (John McGivney School Authority)*

**Holland Bloorview**  
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

**Bloorview**  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE



## SHARING OUR WORK

We shared project plans and updates through a Knowledge Connection presentation at Holland Bloorview in December 2015.

We hosted a webinar in June 2016 to share our findings with educators and AAC clinicians, as well as those who participated.

We presented a poster at the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication conference in August 2016.

We will submit a journal manuscript for publication.

## WHAT WAS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

The aim of the study was to develop an early version of a questionnaire to measure the effectiveness of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) for children and youth at school. We intended this questionnaire to be completed by teachers and special educators who support students with AAC needs.

## WHAT DID WE DO?

### Phase 1:

**Purpose:** To create a pool of possible items to include in the new questionnaire.

**Methods:** Twenty-two educators and AAC clinicians with at least 5 years' experience and youth who used AAC systems completed a survey to tell us what topics to cover in the questionnaire.

**Results:** Participants ranked 11 topics as most important. We created 10-12 items for each topic. The first version of the questionnaire had 113 items.

### Phase 2:

**Purpose:** To be sure the questionnaire items were clear and relevant for educators.

**Stage 1 Methods:** Ten educators with experience supporting at least one student with AAC needs in the past five years reviewed the items we created in Phase 1. They read and rated each item by indicating their degree of agreement. If the item was unclear or not applicable, then they indicated this instead of providing a rating.

**Stage 2 Methods:** Eight of the 10 educators attended a group meeting. During the meeting, educators reviewed items flagged as unclear or not applicable. Together they recommended rewording or removing items from the questionnaire.

**Results:** Our team reviewed the recommendations of educators who took part in this phase. We changed 1/3 of the items from the original questionnaire following this review.

## IMPACT FOR CLIENTS, FAMILIES AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

This study is a first step towards a better understanding of the real-world functioning of children who use AAC in school. Understanding the effectiveness of AAC will help clinical teams to identify unmet communication needs. Addressing these needs will help to improve the health and well-being of children with disabilities.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Our team created a new educator questionnaire to better understand how children who need AAC function at school. In phase 1, we obtained support for the **content validity** of the new measure. This means that we ensured that the questionnaire included important topics to consider when measuring the effectiveness of AAC. In phase 2, we established the **face validity** of the measure. We did this by ensuring that questionnaire items were clear and relevant to teachers and educational assistants.

## NEXT STEPS?

This project launched a series of research studies that will lead to providing evidence to inform clinical decision making about AAC for children and youth with complex communication needs. Future studies will allow us to check the reliability and validity of the new questionnaire. Once we show that the questionnaire is sound, clinicians can use it in their daily clinical practice.

### TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT:

Steve Ryan  
sryan@hollandbloorview.ca  
416-425-6220 ext. 3526

### THIS PROJECT WAS FUNDED BY:

The Centre for Leadership in  
Participation and Inclusion at  
Holland Bloorview Kids  
Rehabilitation Hospital

## WHO ARE WE?

Our research team includes a researcher with expertise in health measurement development and research methods; AAC clinical specialists who coordinate the education and training for 27 AAC clinics across Ontario; and educators with extensive experience teaching and supporting students who use AAC.

## THANK YOU!

We would like to thank all of our participants who contributed to the development of our new questionnaire.

We would also like to thank the following school boards, independent schools and organizations that supported the involvement of educators, clinicians, and youth who use AAC:

- Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
- Bloorview School Authority
- Toronto District School Board
- Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board
- Durham District School Board
- Giant Steps
- Community Advantage Rehabilitation